

BREIDING HOUSE  
Georgetown  
1523 Thirty-first Street, Northwest  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS DC-831  
*DC, GEO, 228-*

PHOTOGRAPHS

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FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### BREIDING HOUSE

HABS NO. DC-831

Location: 1523 31<sup>ST</sup> Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: Bernice and David Blair

Present Use: private residence

Significance: The Breiding House is significant as a rare, late, well-designed, urban expression of H.H. Richardson and McKim, Mead & White's interpretation, primarily from the mid-1870s to the early 1880s, of their contemporary, Richard Norman Shaw's domestic architecture in England. In the three architect's works, this Shavian style was marked by the use of a variety of materials, shapes, and colors on the facade and roof, and especially in the American expression, the roof became the visually dominant element and often with the entire structure being incorporated within a single massive gable roof.

#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

##### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: In August, 1885, Lt. Harrie Webster received a permit (# 405 ½) to build one brick building, two stories and basement with double pitch slate roof and galvanized tin cornice. The next month, Edward Godey received a permit to build two small brick buildings on the same lots (permit # 475). It is assumed that while Webster built on parcel 237, which fronts 31<sup>st</sup> Street, Godey built on the back parcels, 238 and 239. The dimensions on Webster's building permit are very close to those of 1523 31<sup>st</sup> Street.

2. Original and subsequent owners:  
(Lot 817, Square 1269 {old square 99}, part of parcels 237, 238, 239, 281 & 282)

1800        Deed (E-192)  
              Thomas Beall of Geo et ux Nancy (?)  
              To  
              Samuel Turner Jr.

1806        Deed (Q 314)  
              Samuel Turner Jr.  
              To  
              Thomas Turner

- 1807        Deed (U-20)  
              Thomas Turner et ux Eleanor  
              To  
              Nicholas Ligan
- 1810        Deed (Z-393 {308})  
              Nicholas Ligan et ux Susanna  
              To  
              Francis Dodge Sr.
- 1876        Deed of Trust (814-360)  
              Mary B. Marbury; Emily, Robert P., Francis, Allen, William, Charles and  
              Alexander H. Dodge; Benjamin P. Poore et ux Virginia; Charles Lanman  
              et ux Adeline  
              To  
              Francis, Robert P. and Allen Dodge, trustees under last will of Francis  
              Dodge, dec'd for Mary B. Marbury, Emily Dodge, Virginia Poore and  
              Adeline Lanman

Reference will of Francis Dodge Will Book 6 page 449. Caption property in trust for Mary B. Magruder, Emily Dodge, Virginia Poore and Adeline Lanman.

- 1881        Deed and release (964-470)  
              Robert P. Dodge, trustee for Emily Dodge  
              Austin Herr  
              To  
              Abraham H. Herr
- Covers caption
- 1881        Deed (983-122)  
              Abraham Herr  
              To  
              John W. Metz
- Caption plus
- 1882        Deed and release (994-235)  
              Allen Dodge, surviving trustee for Emily Dodge under will of Francis  
              Dodge  
              Emily Dodge  
              Charles M. Matthews  
              To

John W. Metz

1882      Deed (992-423)  
            John W. Metz et ux Mary E.  
            To  
            Mary S. Williams

Part lots 237, 238, 239 & 240 and 280, 281 & 282 covering caption

1885      Deed (1133-346)  
            Mary S. Williams, NMS  
            To  
            Harrie Webster

Caption

1903      Deed (2752-25)  
            Harrie Webster & wife Mary H.  
            To  
            George W. Slatford

Caption

This partial chain of title is taken from one at the Peabody Room, with mortgages and quickclaims omitted. The meaning of the references to caption and caption plus is unknown.

The above chain of title shows the Websters owning the house through 1903, but a 1901 building permit lists Henry Simpson as owner, occupant, and architect. It is assumed that 1901 permit should have only listed Simpson as architect.

1947      permit for minor repairs and to install bathroom partition  
            lists miss Martha B. Walters as owner.

1999      Deed (?)  
            Bruce A. and Hope B. Breiding  
            To  
            David B. and Bernice M. Blair

From a Washington Post clipping at the Peabody Room.

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: the permit lists L. H. Page as architect and Kenderline & Parrett as builder

4. Original plans and construction: No information available.

5. Alterations and additions: Extensive renovations, designed by Rob Hetem of RH Design Group, for the new owners are still being completed. These renovations were cosmetic rather than structurally, bringing the interior back to a more finished, attractive, and practical state, especially in the kitchen and the basement, for a family with young children.

Earlier renovations are more critical to the evolution of the house. In 1899, owner and occupant Harrie Webster obtained permit #1425 to “tear out back wall of main building and build a circular bay...” This circular bay is at the rear of the kitchen; and it is clear from the relationship of this circular bay to adjacent three-sided bay, especially at the awkward junction of the latter’s north window and the circular bay, that the kitchen bay is not original. This permit also included adding the oriel window on the north facade “over the private alley.” Henry Simpson was the architect for this alteration as well as the next one, in 1901. Permit # 412 called for strengthening the front portico: “remove wood columns and replace with iron columns.” Also the stone steps and coping were reset, three iron anchor rods were inserted and the iron coal door was added to the south side of the porch. The first alterations, done fourteen years after the house was built, suggest the owner wanted to open up the interior and perhaps add more visually interesting details. But two years later, the alterations suggest that potentially serious structural problems were developing at the front of the house. (As noted in an earlier section, a bathroom partition was installed in 1974.)

#### B. Historical Context:

Unlike most, if not all the 23 other houses in this documentation project, 1523 31<sup>st</sup> Street is not associated with famous figures, and, therefore, there is not the clippings on its various owners and occupants in the Peabody Room or the Washingtoniana Room of the D.C. Public Library. The lack of prominent associations with this house no doubt reflect its modest lot size and late date of construction. In its historical anonymity it is representative of the majority of houses in Georgetown. It is most likely the only house in this project to be built by a middle class person, a lieutenant in the navy, rather than upwardly mobile merchant/real estate speculator or high government official.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

#### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Its eclectic and bold design makes 1523 31<sup>st</sup> Street appear to be much more than a narrow two and ½ story building. This Georgetown expression of an American architectural style based on a British style used both in suburban and urban areas, but almost exclusively suburban or country in its best American expressions captures the essence of

Norman Shaw's and H.H. Richardson's best work- controlled exuberance.

2. Condition of fabric: The house is in excellent condition, having recently been renovated for its new owners. Cosmetic work on the interior is still ongoing.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This house is 28 feet across the front facade and 35 feet tall and 40 feet deep.

2. Foundations: Brick.

3. Walls: The courses consist entirely of stretchers of a dark orange pressed brick with tight mortar joints of the same color as the brick. The mortar is flush with the brick surface and scored where it meets the brick. A watertable just below the windows runs around the projecting front bay.

4. Structural system, framing: It is assumed that the system is heavy timber framing.

5. Porches, stoops: Five brownstone steps lead up to the landing to the right of front facade's main bay. A low wall, with an s-curve stone coping, to the right of these steps separates them from the stone stairs down to the basement entrance. In the rear, a flight of wooden stairs with railings, and a 90 degree turn at the bottom, lead up to the enclosed rear porch, a story above the ground.

The front porch is one of the house's major design elements, with four turned, iron columns supporting a balustraded cornice which in turn supports a wall of imbricated wood shingles culminating above in a triangular wedge of roof decorated with a sunburst emanating from the right angle corner of the wedge.

6. Chimneys: Tall chimneys with caps are within the north and south walls. Each chimney has a thin, recessed panel along the west face. A decorative iron bar with a curlicue at the chimney end ties the north chimney to the roof.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The wooden front door has a wooden panel across the top. Beneath it the door is divided into 12 small, square wooden panels. In front of this door is a glass storm door with wooden frame. Above the two doors is a transom light. The front door opens onto a small vestibule. Its floor is covered in encaustic tiles. Beyond this floor is a second door separating the vestibule from the hall. This door is identical to the front door except that the upper panel is glass. There is also a transom light above this door. The front basement door has a large light for the top half of the door and below is divided into four panels. An arched

transom light is above that door. This door has slightly segmentally arched voussoir. On the rear, modern sliding glass doors connect the stairs and porch and the dining room and kitchen have doors opening onto the porch. Double doors, replicating the adjacent windows with the additional of panels below the chair rail, open into the dining room from the porch. The upper half of the kitchen door is a glass pane, with two vertical recessed panels below, and there is a transom light above the door.

b. Windows: All but two window openings have flat heads, with the two first floor windows on the front bay united under one flat arch with splayed ends. The other first floor window on the mains facade also has a splayed header. The basement window has a round arch with voussoir, and the rear windows which are arched. But the header of the window themselves are flat. The most interesting and characteristic feature of the windows is not the shape of the openings, but the use of small and large panes. The double hung windows have a single light in the bottom sash, while in the upper sash, the center pane is bordered by small panes. These small lights are repeated in the two windows at the extreme south end of the main (west) facade and in the French window in the gable, filling the window opening. This mixing of sizes of panes and treating upper and lower sash is common in late 19<sup>th</sup> century American domestic architecture. A three-part oriel window projects onto the north alley. Only the rear windows have shutters.

#### 8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The slate covered gable roof runs perpendicular to the street, but several dormers and a roof over the south end of the house run parallel to the street. In addition the south slope of the front gable is extended to incorporate the attic above the porch. The overall visual appearance is of a roof with a dominant gable competing with several lesser roof appendages, running perpendicular to the gable.

b. Cornice, eaves: As the front of the house steps forward and the second floor projects beyond the first, deep cornices (or stringcourses) are used to emphasize these changes in planes, between the first and second floors, within the pedimented gable, above the porch attic, and at the roof line. Above the fascia, series of bed moldings are used to step the cornice farther out, casting shadows across parts of the front facade.

c. Dormers: The north and south sides each have one dormer, covered in slate with a gable roof. The south dormer is much closer to the front of the house than the north one.

#### C. Description of the Interior:

##### 1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: The basement has been renovated, creating two major spaces, an office on the north and a playroom on the south. West of these two rooms are some storage and utility

rooms.

b. First floor: The front door opens onto a small stair hall running north-south. The stair hall opens into the parlor, the kitchen, and dining room. The parlor is west of the stair hall, the kitchen is east of the stair hall and the dining room is south of the kitchen. On the west wall of the dining room is the door to a bathroom, which is south of the stair hall.

c. Second floor and attic not viewed.

2. Stairway: An open-string, open-well stairs climbs along the west side of the stair hall. The landing runs along the north wall and the final run ascends the east wall of the stair hall. Having the stairs at a right angle to the entrance door and nearly tucked away in an alcove is characteristic of H.H. Richardson and Stanford White's architecture in the 1870s and early 1880s. The square newel is decorated with circles of decreasing size and recessed panels, as well as a square cap. The newel at the landing lacks the surface decoration, but has a ball cap. The bottoms of the upper level newels are chamfered and below the chamfer is a ball pendant. Each tread supports three turned balusters. The each string for the tread and for the riser is a shallow, rectangular piece of wood. The balustrade is done in a dark stained wood.

Stairs to the basement are below these stairs and entered through a door at the north end of the stair hall. If there was a secondary or servants stairs to the second floor, it no longer exists.

3. Flooring: The floors are narrow boards running east-west in the first floor rooms. While much of the flooring in the kitchen runs east-west some of it laid at right angles and other boards are curved to accommodate the irregular areas created by having a curved wall at the east end. The basement is carpeted and as mentioned earlier the vestibule is surfaced in tile.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings are plaster, with wooden baseboards and cornice. The one chair rail, which is wood, is in the stair hall. In the dining room, parlor, and bathroom, the walls have wallpaper. The cornices, which appear recent, consist of convex fascias which build up by gradual projections. The corners of front walls of the parlor bay are curved, but the cornice does not follow the curve, instead forming a right angle.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Several of the doors between rooms have been removed, but doors to the bathroom (one door into the wetbar and a second door into the bathroom), the vestibule (already described), and between the kitchen and dining room remain. Each of these doors has a transom light above and the door between the kitchen and dining room has a large glass pane in the top half. The two doors into the wetbar/bathroom have horizontal recessed panels. The door surrounds have reeding, with bullseye corners.

b. Windows: All window surrounds are scaled down versions of the door surrounds, with reeding and bullseye corners. The windows in the parlor have interior paneled shutters, which fit into the window reveals. The wall below the parlor windows is paneled and in the center is a raised panel. Also in the parlor is the three-part oriel window with leaded glass. This window's wooden shelf projects into the room and supported by a simple bracket. The window's soffit is decorated with raised wooden panels. The transition from jamb to header in this window is handled by an abstract profile of a bird with long trailing feathers. All three windows open or at least have hardware. The other notable window is a double hung, leaded stained glass window illuminating the stair landing. The kitchen windows repeat the curve of the rear wall, giving them a projecting sill, supported by a bracket.

6. Decorative features and trim: The fireplace in the parlor has glazed brick hearth, glazed terra squares depicting birds and vines for the fireplace face, and a wooden surround. The wooden surround is rather elaborate. The fireplace jambs consist of a center pier formed by two fluted square piers flanking an unfluted pier, with scrolled foot, and in turn the piers' capital supports two brackets which support the mantelshelf. These brackets have fluting and other incised decoration. The mantel, between the brackets, is filled by two raised panels. The other fireplace, in the dining room, is more subdued. The tiles for the fireplace facing are less bold, the size and members of the jambs are simpler, being a single square pier with projecting foot and bracket supporting the mantelshelf. The mantel consists simply of fascia with two of the five fluted.

7. Hardware: Little original hardware remains, except for perhaps for a pistle on the basement door, wall grill, and for the radiator in the kitchen.

8. Mechanical systems: Forced air heating/ air conditioning with ducts in the walls and steam radiators.

#### D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: This house, which faces west towards 31<sup>st</sup> Street, sits at the front of a long, but narrow lot. While lacking any front yard beyond a planter, the parcel does contain a large backyard. The rear yard is a story below street level, necessitating a long flight of stairs down from the rear deck. that is a story lower than is substantially above the street level. To either side of the parcel there is a narrow strip of land, and this so-called private alley north of the house provides access to the side and back of the house. The alley south of the house is blocked by a tall fence of vertical boards.

2. Historic landscape design: Unknown. According to a 1942 article in the Times Herald, Mrs. Lillian Wright Smith designed a rose garden for the backyard where a tennis court once stood.

3. Outbuildings: None

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Peabody Room of the Georgetown Branch of the D.C. Public Library had a partial chain of title and a newspaper article. Permits were researched at the National Archives.

Prepared by: Bill Lebovich, architectural historian, April 2000

### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Georgetown Documentation Project was sponsored by the Commission of Fine Arts and undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service. Principals involved were Charles H. Atherton, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and E. Blaine Cliver, Chief, HABS/HAER. The documentation was undertaken in two phases. The summer 1998 team was supervised by John P. White, FAIA, Professor of Architecture, Texas Tech University; and architecture technicians Robert C. Anderson, Boston Architectural Center; Aimee Charboneau, Tulane University; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Adam Maksay, United States/International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS) architect from the Transylvania Trust. Historic research was initiated by Bryan C. Green, historian, Richmond, Virginia, during this summer. The summer 1999 team was supervised by Roger S. Miller, architect, Alexandria, Virginia, and architecture technicians David Benton, The Catholic University of America; Edward Byrdy, The Catholic University of America; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Clara Albert, US/ICOMOS architect from the Transylvania Trust. The project historian, and author of the written reports, was William Lebovich, architectural historian, Chevy Chase, Maryland. The photography was undertaken by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, and James Rosenthal, photographic assistant.